



E. J. Thomas Hall

Melissa Paul

The opening of E. J. Thomas Performing Arts Hall in October 1973 marked the culmination of many years of planning and fundraising by thousands of Akron residents, faculty and staff, corporations, foundations, and the federal government. The community wanted a state-of-the-art facility designed to accommodate world-class concerts, operas, ballets, lectures, and theatre productions. Goodyear set the philanthropic pace with a gift of \$1.25 million for E. J. Thomas Hall.

The three-level auditorium features continental seating—meaning there are no aisles—and a seating capacity of 2,955. One of the focal points of the building is the movable forty-four-ton ceiling, which can close off either the Flying Balcony or both the Flying Balcony and the Grand Tier. Located in Goodrich Lobby and weighing over forty tons are the twenty-seven chrome Witzman Counterweights, which balance the ceiling in the house and are computer controlled.

The Akron Symphony Orchestra opened E. J. Thomas on October 9, 1973, with a program that featured the world premiere of "Initium" by Carlos Chavez, commissioned for the Akron Symphony and E. J. Thomas opening by members of Witan in celebration of its twenty-fifth anniversary.

The early years saw summer musical theatre productions by producer Jack Horner and designer Ernie Harris. They were followed in the mid-1970s by the irrepressible John Kenley and his John Kenley Players, which brought such stage and television luminaries as Robert Goulet, Joe Namath, and Betty White to Akron.

Annually, more than 400,000 people of all ages visit E. J. Thomas Hall for a variety of programs and activities, ranging from Broadway-touring productions to University student concerts and performances. E. J. Thomas is home to the Akron Symphony Orchestra, Tuesday Musical Association, and Children's Concert Society. High school and university commencements, dance competitions, classes, Akron Children's Hospital's Charity Ball, children's programs, performers from all over the world, and alumni events fill the facility's calendar.